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27 September 1980

MEMORANDUM

ZIA-UL-HAQ: A POLITICAL PORTRAIT

Zia has ruled Pakistan for more than three years, despite his declining popular support, his inability to reach a lasting accommodation with any political party, and continued questioning of his ability and goals.

His position at the moment appears secure. No single civilian leader has enough popular support to challenge Zia, and his many opponents are badly divided. Grumbling continues in the military, but senior officers seem to have no desire to assume Zia's responsibilities or to believe that things would be much better were he replaced.

In the past three years, Zia has demonstrated political skill in a few crucial areas.

- He has kept martial law lenient enough to be tolerable for most Pakistanis and has clamped down only at times-- such as Bhutto's execution--when there was a clear threat of civil disorder.
- He has handled military politics well, making sure that most senior officers acquiesce in major decisions including two major shifts in senior personnel that have weakened his potential rivals and strengthened his friends.
- His foreign policy has met with general approval in Pakistan. Pakistanis are proud of the leading role in the Islamic world he has obtained for Pakistan, and his handling of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has been an asset domestically.

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Zia probably sees himself as a man with a mission imposed by God to make Pakistan into a stable, Islamic nation. He would still prefer an elected civilian government--albeit with Zia as President--to military rule. He was likely sincere when he promised elections in 1977 and again in 1979, but later concluded that the probable results--a victory by Bhutto's party--would not only set back the process of political reform and Islamization, but lead to further instability.

His restrictions on political activity reflect his frustration in trying to deal with politicians who in his view have acted irresponsibly and are more interested in personal power than in the goals Zia has for Pakistan. Contrary to the charges of his political enemies, the dangers political activity posed to Zia's personal position were probably only secondary consideration for him.

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Zia may believe the Islamic reforms he is trying to make are the most important part of his mission. Although he presumably hopes they will increase his domestic support and improve Pakistan's position with Islamic oil producers, Zia's own deep faith provides the impetus.

Despite Zia's current problems with Washington, he remains basically pro-Western. He and most of his senior advisers still see the US as the ultimate guarantor of Pakistani independence. Zia is, however, deeply disappointed by what he sees as Washington's failure to understand Pakistan's needs--particularly the need to have nuclear weapons, our unwillingness to give Pakistan the military support Zia believes is necessary in the face of Soviet expansion, and a US policy toward the subcontinent perceived in Islamabad as pro-Indian. Even so, he has resisted the recommendations of some of his advisers that Pakistan should seek an accommodation with the USSR.

Zia, a professional Army officer, was made Chief of Army staff by Bhutto in 1976. Although Bhutto promoted him over several other officers on the assumption he could be controlled easily, in 1977 Zia seized power and made himself Chief Martial Law Administrator because he feared further civil disorder and was under pressure from his subordinates. When the President resigned in 1978, Zia assumed that position as well. He is currently in the US to address the UN General Assembly as the spokesman for the Islamic Conference--in effect as representative of the Muslim World.

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